

The Government of the District of Columbia



Department of Health

Date: April 15, 2005

To: Health Care Practitioners

From: John O. Davies-Cole, PhD, MPH
State Epidemiologist

Re: Advisory #1A: Potentially Hazardous Material in Laboratory Testing Samples

Background: As many of you are aware, on Friday April 8, 2005, the College of American Pathologists reported to clinical laboratories that several proficiency testing samples contained one or more vials of influenza A/H2N2. Laboratories were asked to destroy samples from the identified testing panels.

Viruses of the H2N2 subtype have not circulated since 1967 and persons born after 1968 will have no or only limited immunity against this subtype and therefore a growing segment of the human population may be susceptible to infection by H2N2 viruses. Thus, working with H2N2 viruses could theoretically pose a health risk to laboratory staff born after 1968. No H2N2 component is contained in current trivalent influenza vaccines.

Recommendations:

1. Health care providers seeing patients presenting with influenza-like illness should obtain a work history to determine if the patient works in a clinical laboratory and, if so, is the patient aware if that laboratory has worked with or received these testing samples. If the answer to either of these questions is "yes," please separate the patient, use droplet precautions and notify the District of Columbia Department of Health **immediately**.
 - a. Place patient in a separate room
 - i. Negative air flow is not necessary
 - b. Place surgical mask on patient
 - c. Health care workers attending to patient should also wear surgical mask
 - d. Practice, as always, effective hand washing
2. Rapid Influenza antigen testing may yield both false positive and false negative results and should not be relied upon for exclusionary or inclusion testing.

Further Resources:

1. CDC Websites:
 - a. <http://www.phppo.cdc.gov/HAN/ArchiveSys/ViewMsgV.asp?AlertNum=00227>
 - b. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip> (Isolation Procedures)
2. District of Columbia Department of Health Bureau of Communicable Disease, (202) 442-9374. If after hours (M-F, 8:15am- 4:45pm), please call (202) 727-6161.